

Attachment A

King County Public Health Operational Master Plan

A Policy Framework for the Health of the Public

January 23, 2007

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Introduction

King County provides a wide variety of regional public health services that protect and promote the health of all 1.8 million residents of King County, as well as the hundreds of thousands of workers and visitors who enter the County each day. In addition to providing many services directly, King County works collaboratively with many other entities to address health needs of people living, working and visiting in King County.

Public health needs to continue to expand and diversify because of changing conditions among King County's populations which are influenced by national, state, and local forces -- the rise of chronic conditions like diabetes, obesity and asthma; emerging diseases and concerns such as pandemic flu, West Nile virus, and terrorism; and an increasing number of people who lack health insurance.

King County is establishing broad public health policy through the Public Health Operational Master Plan (PHOMP). The PHOMP is necessitated by funding challenges which have and will continue to face the Public Health fund for the foreseeable future. The PHOMP seeks to assure that these funding challenges can be met strategically and rationally. The funding challenges arise from a combination of limited or declining revenues, increasing costs of existing public health services, and increasing public health needs and mandates. The PHOMP will also provide an opportunity to evaluate and prioritize the most effective ways to improve the health of the population.

The purpose of the plan is to define policies and create a sustainable operational and financing model for the provision of essential public health services in King County.

I. King County's Mission & Goal for the Health of the Public

King County Government's mission, through its Executive, County Council, Board of Health and the Department of Public Health, is to identify and promote the conditions under which all people can live within healthy communities and can achieve optimum health.

King County's goal is to protect and improve the health and well-being of all people in King County, as defined by per person healthy years lived. In the context of achieving this goal, whenever possible, King County will employ strategies, policies and interventions to reduce health disparities across all segments of the population.

II. Definitions

1. Health: King County regards health as a state of physical, mental and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity.
2. Factors Affecting Health: King County recognizes that many factors affect health. For example, health is affected by age, race, income, ethnicity, immigrant/refugee status, gender, sexual orientation, gender identity, neighborhood, level of education, health behaviors, environment, housing, accessibility of quality health care, genetics and the provision of public health services.
3. Public Health: Public health is defined as the organized efforts to (a) protect the population from natural and human-made health threats, (b) promote health by providing reliable information and an environment in which people and communities can make informed decisions that impact their health, and (c) assure the provision of quality preventative and curative health services. Public health is carried out by the public health system, which includes the governing bodies of County government, the department of public health, and the many public health partners. The department of public health is the regional entity that leads, mobilizes and coordinates the broader public health system to accomplish the work of public health. Public health partners are those governmental entities, private organizations, communities, and individuals who are working with the department of public health, either formally or informally, to advance the health of the community.
4. Healthy Community: King County considers a healthy community to be a place where social infrastructure and policies support health and where essential public health services, including quality health care, are available. In a healthy community: community members and groups actively communicate and collaborate with one another to achieve healthy conditions; the contributions of ethnically, socially and economically diverse community members are valued; the broad array of determinants of health is addressed; and individuals are able to make informed, positive choices in an environment that protects and supports health.

III. Guiding Principles

King County's Public Health strategies, policies and programs shall be:

1. Based on Science and Evidence: King County's public health strategies are based whenever possible on science and evidence.
2. Focused on Prevention: King County recognizes that the best investments are those that prevent disease and promote good health. Prevention and promotion strategies achieve optimal health impact in the most cost-effective manner.
3. Centered on the Community: King County's public health solutions require collaboration of the entire community. In order to arrive at solutions which best meet the needs of all, King County's public health system must include partnerships with a wide variety of communities, government agencies and private organizations.¹
4. Driven by Social Justice: King County will proactively pursue the elimination of preventable differences in health among different population groups. Public health will be a voice for the needs of the weak, the poor, minorities and the disenfranchised.²

¹ King County values the partnerships with cities and unincorporated areas in order to improve the health of the entire region. King County values the role that the City of Seattle has in the delivery of public health services in Seattle and the significant financial contributions that the City of Seattle dedicates for public and community health services in Seattle. As many of the services provided by King County government can affect health, the County will engage its departments in considering the health impacts of County services and opportunities to improve health through the development of County policies, such as those embodied in the County Comprehensive Plan.

² Compelling evidence shows differential rates of health problems among populations based on race, income, ethnicity, immigrant/refugee status, gender, sexual orientation, gender identity, health insurance status, cognitive and physical impairments, neighborhood, and level of education. These health disparities are persistent and increasing in King County. These disparities demand priority attention and a long-term commitment to identifying and eradicating their causes.

IV. Public Health Functions

King County acknowledges that public health includes promotion of physical, behavioral, environmental, social, and economic conditions that improve health and well-being; preventing illness, disease, injury, and premature death; and creating health equity.

King County's governmental public health functions include:

1. Health Protection: King County has fundamental and statutorily defined responsibilities and powers to protect the public's health. These responsibilities include such as: tracking disease and other threats to the public's health; preventing and treating communicable diseases; regulating dangerous environmental and workplace exposures; and ensuring the safety of water, air, and food. Regulatory action should be taken when it is warranted and will result in significant improvements to the public's health and safety. King County must also prepare for and respond to natural and human-made disasters and plays a leadership role in engaging the community in emergency preparedness.
2. Health Promotion: King County is responsible for leading efforts to promote health and prevent injuries such as those from traffic accidents and unsafe handling of firearms, and chronic conditions such as heart disease, diabetes, and obesity. These complex health challenges often are best addressed through voluntary actions by individuals and organizations in combination with governmental policies that make the right health choice the easy health choice. Through a collaborative and educational approach, the department of public health encourages voluntary actions with science-based evidence and effective interventions that maximize people's ability to make healthy choices.
3. Providing Preventative and Curative Quality Health Care Services: King County's role in personal health care services is to help assure access to high quality health care for all populations and to fulfill critical public health responsibilities such as preventing the spread of communicable diseases. Helping to assure access to quality health care includes convening and leading system-wide efforts to improve access and quality, advocating for access to quality health care for all, forming partnerships with services providers, and/or directly providing individual health services when there are important public health reasons to do so.

To fulfill its responsibilities in each of three functions listed above, the department undertakes the following types of activities:

- A. Assessment: The department of public health must regularly track health status, identify emerging health problems and disease outbreaks, analyze health outcomes and interventions, and report on these to the public. Through this activity, the department supports the development of effective responses by all components of the public health system.

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- B. Policy Development: The department of public health must work in collaboration with community and government leaders to formulate evidence-based public policies designed to solve health problems.
- C. Assurance: The department of public health must engage policy-makers and the public in determining those services that will be guaranteed to every member of the community and ensure that these services are available through encouraging action by public and private entities, implementing regulatory requirements, ensuring communities and the public health staff are prepared to respond to public health emergencies or directly providing services.

V. Organizational Attributes of the Department of Public Health

King County intends that its department of public health shall:

- Pursue excellence and innovation in public health practice, including prudent risk-taking and applied research;
- Recruit and retain a talented, dedicated, well-trained and prepared workforce;
- Provide recognized leadership, both adaptive and directive;
- Communicate clearly and accurately with our partners and the public;
- Emphasize collaboration when so indicated;
- Develop and maintain state of the art tools and systems to protect the public's health, promote healthy communities and provide reliable, high quality public health services;
- Lead system-wide strategic planning and performance evaluation in order to continually improve effectiveness and to help assure that resources of the public health system are being effectively deployed to achieve priority health outcomes;
- Adhere to sound operational practices and systems including assuring the transparency, cost effectiveness, and accountability of its activities, services and outcomes.

VI. Prioritizing Public Health Strategies

King County will use the following criteria to guide prioritization of public health strategies, while recognizing that prioritization also requires value-based judgments across public health functions that are not directly comparable. Strategies that most fully address the set of criteria should have highest priority.

Values/Principles

- The strategy is consistent with this policy framework.
- The strategy assists in achieving health equity.

Evidence & Measurement

- The strategy is predicted to create a larger increase in the number of healthy years lived than other current or potential activities.
- The strategy either addresses a demonstrated, measurable public health need or is a defensible precautionary effort to protect health when the risk is uncertain.
- The strategy has been successful elsewhere and/or affords an opportunity to innovate with a reasonable likelihood of being successful.
- The strategy maintains public health programs and interventions that are working.
- The strategy has objective measures to evaluate progress.

System

- The strategy utilizes and enhances the strength of the public health system, including public health partners and the community.
- The strategy avoids unnecessary duplication of the work of other organizations.
- The public health system has the necessary infrastructure and adequate funding has been identified to support the strategy or actions are being taken to develop the necessary resources.
- The strategy uses and enhances existing systems or develops new systems where needed in order to prepare and respond to public health emergencies.

Funding

- Local, flexible funding is necessary for the support of critical public health functions and key infrastructure (including planning, research, and analysis) and should also be used to leverage other funds.
- Licensure programs should be supported by fees.
- A funding opportunity exists to support the strategy.

APPENDIX:

VII. Essential Responsibilities of the Seattle-King County Department of Public Health:

The essential responsibilities of the Seattle-King County Department of Public Health are defined by the National Association of County and City Health Departments, Operational Definition of a Functional Local Health Department.³ The definition is a shared understanding of what people in any community, regardless of size, can expect from a department of public health.

- Understands the specific health issues confronting the community, and how physical, behavioral, environmental, social, and economic conditions affect them.
- Investigates health problems and health threats.
- Serves as an essential resource for local governing bodies and policymakers on up-to-date public health laws and policies.
- Engages the community to address public health issues.
- Coordinates the public health system's efforts in an intentional, non-competitive, and non-duplicative manner.
- Ensures compliance with public health laws and ordinances, using enforcement authority when appropriate.
- Addresses health disparities.
- Prevents, minimizes, and contains adverse health effects from communicable diseases, disease outbreaks from unsafe food and water, chronic diseases, environmental hazards, injuries, and risky health behaviors.
- Leads planning and response activities for public health emergencies.
- Collaborates with other local responders and with state and federal agencies to intervene in other emergencies with public health significance (e.g., natural disasters).
- Implements health promotion programs.
- Provides science-based, timely, and culturally competent health information and health alerts to the media and to the community.
- Develops partnerships with public and private healthcare providers and institutions, community based organizations, and other government agencies (e.g., housing authority, criminal justice, education) engaged in services that affect health to collectively identify, alleviate, and act on the sources of public health problems.
- Strategically plans its services and activities, evaluates performance and outcomes, and makes adjustments as needed to continually improve its effectiveness, enhance the community's health status, and meet the community's expectations.
- Provides its expertise to others who treat or address issues of public health significance.
- Employs well-trained staff members who have the necessary resources to implement best practices and evidence-based programs and interventions.
- Facilitates research efforts that benefit the community.
- Conducts research that contributes to the evidence base of public health.

³ National Association of County and City Health Departments, November, 2005